

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1066
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS (BY POUCH)

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 QUEBEC 0290

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJ: UPDATE ON QUEBEC'S LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

1. SUMMARY: WITH BILL 101 NOW MIRED IN TORTUOUS CLAUSE BY CLAUSE DEBATE IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND AMID SIGNS THAT GOQ MAY BE SOFTENING ITS HERETOFORE RIGID STANCE, CONGEN FEELS FOLLOWING RUNDOWN OF SAGA OF BILLS ONE/101 SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PQ'S LANDMARK LANGUAGE LEGISLATION MIGHT BE USEFUL TO ADDRESSEES. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CAMILLE LAURIN INTRODUCED PQ'S NEW LANGUAGE LAW, BILL ONE, ON APRIL 27, ALMOST ONE MONTH AFTER PUBLICATION OF PQ'S WHITE PAPER ON THE SUBJECT. WHITE PAPER HAD CREATED AN IMMEDIATE UPROAR, PARTICULARLY AMONG ANGLOPHONE COMMUNITY MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED, AND BILL ONE DID NOTHING TO SOOTHE TEMPERS. TO THE CONSTERNATION OF ANGLOPHONES AND SOME FRANCOPHONE GROUPS, BILL ONE DIFFERED ONLY MARGINALLY FROM WHITE PAPER (FOR FULL REPORTING OF PROVISIONS OF BOTH WHITE PAPER AND BILL ONE, SEE QUEBEC 0143 AND 0174).

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EM THERE WERE IMMEDIATE INDICATIONS THAT PQ LEADERSHIP ITSELF WAS SPLIT OVER THE BILL, IN SPITE OF LAURIN'S IMPASSIONED AND UNEQUIVOCAL INSISTENCE THAT THE DRACONIAN LEGISLATION WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO CORRECT PAST LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FRANCOPHONES AND TO HALT EROSION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN QUEBEC. LEVESQUE, ON THE OTHER HAND, PRONOUNCED

HIMSELF "UNEASY" OVER THE BILL, AND WORRIED PUBLICLY THAT SEVERAL OF ITS PROVISIONS WERE TOO HARSH, PARTICULARLY THOSE RESTRICTING ENTRY TO ANGLOPHONE SCHOOLS. THROUGHOUT THE FIRST MONTHS OF DEBATE, LEVESQUE AND OTHER LANGUAGE MODERATES WITHIN THE PQ SUPPORTED LAURIN AND THE HARDLINERS IN PUBLIC, BUT CONTINUED TO EXPRESS MISGIVINGS WITHIN CABINET WHICH INEVITABLY FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THE PRESS.

4. BILL ONE PASSED FIRST READING RAPIDLY, ALTHOUGH OPPOSITION TOOK STEP, UNUSUAL AT FIRST READINGS, OF VOTING AGAINST IT. LAURIN FORMED A PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION COMPOSED OF MEMBERS OF ALL PARTIES, AND BEGAN HEARING THE FIRST OF OVER 250 BRIEFS PRESENTED BY INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS WISHING TO TESTIFY ON THE LEGISLATION.

5. OPPOSITION, COMING CHIEFLY FROM ANGLOPHONES AND IMMIGRANT GROUPS IN MONTREAL AREA BUT ALSO FROM FRANCOPHONE GROUPS WORRIED THAT THEIR CHILDREN WOULD LOSE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ENGLISH, WAS ORIGINALLY DISORGANIZED AND INEFFECTIVE, BUT SOLIDIFIED AS COMMISSION HEARINGS GROUNDED INTO JUNE. PARTICULARLY GOOD PRESENTATIONS WERE MADE BY ANGLOPHONE POSITIVE ACTION COMMITTEE AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AS WELL AS OTHER INFLUENTIAL BUSINESSMEN'S GROUPS. LAURING PRESIDED OVER SEEMINGLY ENDLESS COMMISSION SESSIONS WITH ICY POLITENESS AND BIBLICAL PATIENCE, HEARING EACH GROUP OUT BUT STEADFASTLY REFUSING TO CONSIDER ANY BUT THE MOST MINOR CHANGES TO HIS BILL. SIGNIFI- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CANTLY, HE GAVE THE BACK OF HIS HAND TO A GROUP OF 326 PROMINENT FRANCOPHONE QUEBECOIS WHO HAD WRITTEN TO HIM OPPOSING SOME PROVISIONS OF THE BILL, ACCUSING THEM OF HAVING SOLD OUT TO THE ANGLOPHONES (MONTREAL 0906). THAT EARNED HIM A GLEEFUL DRUBBING IN THE PRESS BUT SOLIDIFIED HIS REPUTATION AS AN UNCOMPROMISING ZEALOT WITH FRANCOPHONE CULTURAL NATIONALISTS.

6. MID-JUNE BROUGHT THE FIRST HINTS OF CHANGE. THE HEARINGS DRONED ON, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S ORIGINAL HOPE OF PASSING THE LEGISLATION BY JUNE 24, QUEBEC'S NATIONAL FESTIVAL, WAS A PIPEDREAM. IF ALL THE BRIEFS WERE TO BE HEARD, THE HEARINGS THEMSELVES WOULD STRETCH THROUGH AUGUST AND THE BILL WOULD BARELY REACH SECOND READING BY THE TIME SCHOOL OPENED IN SEPTEMBER. WITH AN EYE TOWARD ENDING THE HEARINGS EARLY, LAURIN BEGAN TO SPEAK OF "MORE FLEXIBILITY." LEVESQUE WENT FURTHER, HINTING ABOUT DROPPING THE CONTROVERSIAL CLAUSE BARRING CANADIANS FROM OUTSIDE QUEBEC FROM ATTENDING ANGLOPHONE SCHOOLS HERE (THE "QUEBEC OPTION"). LAURIN HIMSELF PROMISED TO DROP A UNIVERSALLY-CONDEMNED CLAUSE STIPULATING THAT BILL ONE HAD LEGAL PRECEDENCE OVER QUEBEC'S HUMAN RIGHTS LAW. LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED THAT BILL ONE WOULD NOT APPLY TO QUEBEC'S

INDIANS AND INNUITS. RUMORS CIRCULATED THAT "MAJOR CHANGES," OR EVEN "A COMPLETE REVISION" OF THE BILL, WERE IN THE WORKS.

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7. BY MID-JULY, THE PQ HAD DECIDED THAT THE COMMISSION HEARINGS HAD GONE ON LONG ENOUGH, THAT BRIEFS WERE BECOMING REPETITIVE AND LITTLE NEW INFORMATION WAS BEING PROVIDED, ALTHOUGH ONLY SOME 60 OF THE 250-PLUS BRIEFS HAD BEEN HEARD. THE GOVERNMENT WAS BEING INCREASINGLY ROASTED EDITORIALLY FOR ALLOWING ITS OBSESSION WITH LANGUAGE TO BLOCK OTHER URGENTLY-NEEDED LEGISLATION. IN ADDITION, THE TALK OF A SERIOUS CABINET SPLIT GREW. LAURIN, IT WAS RUMORED, HAD THREATENED TO RESIGN AND SPLIT THE PQ WIDE OPEN IF HIS LEGISLATION WAS SOFTENED. LEVESQUE WAS SEEN TO HAVE LOST CONTROL OF HIS CABINET. ON JULY 12, IN A BOLD PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVER AIMED AT ENDING THE HEARINGS AND SHORT-CIRCUITING A PLANNED FILIBUSTER BY THE OPPOSITION (WHOSE OBJECTIVE WAS AND IS TO DELAY PASSAGE OF THE BILL UNTIL AFTER THE OPENING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR), GOVERNMENT WITHDREW BILL ONE, INTRODUCED A NEW VERSION KNOWN AS BILL 101, AND WENT DIRECTLY TO SECOND READING ON THE NEW BILL.

8. BILL ONE OPPONENTS WERE STUNNED TO DISCOVER THAT, DESPITE ALL THE TALK OF A MAJOR OVERHAUL, BILL 101 DIFFERED VERY LITTLE IN SUBSTANCE FROM ITS PREDECESSOR. WHILE SEVERAL CONCESSIONS WERE MADE IN THE ECONOMIC AREA (EASING OF PENALTIES FOR FAILURE

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TO FRANCISIZE, EASING OF RESTRICTIONS ON USE OF ENGLISH BY MULTILATERAL CORPORATIONS AND SMALL BUSINESSES), THE HARSH PROVISIONS REGARDING ENTRY INTO ENGLISH SCHOOLS WERE RETAINED. BILL 101 REPRESENTED AN OBVIOUS VICTORY FOR LAURIN AND THE HARDLINERS.

9. PQ'S PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVER BACKFIRED BADLY WHEN OPPOSITION, RAISING CRY OF STEAMROLLER TACTICS AND AUTHORITARIANISM ON PART OF GOVERNMENT, ADROITLY INTRODUCED CENSURE MOTION AGAINST LAURIN AND PQ PARLIAMENTARY LEADER BURNS, THEREBY STALLING BILL 101 PROCEEDINGS. GOQ WAS LEFT IN EMBARRASSING POSITION OF HAVING TWO BILLS ON SAME SUBJECT BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY, WITH A PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION STILL LEGALLY IN EXISTENCE BUT NO LONGER SITTING AND UNABLE TO DELIVER ITS REPORT. PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION, HERETOFORE SCATTERSHOT AND UNINSPIRED, WAS NOW GALVANIZED AND SCENTING BLOOD.

10. SITUATION AT PRESENT IS AS FOLLOWS: BILL 101 IS NOW IN SECOND READING, WITH OPPOSITION USING EFFECTIVE DELAYING TACTICS (LONG THE FORTE OF THE PQ WHEN IT WAS IN OPPOSITION) TO PROLONG DEBATE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. ASSEMBLY NOW DEBATING A LIBERAL MOTION PUTTING OFF FURTHER DEBATE ON THE BILL FOR THREE MONTHS. MOTION WILL OF COURSE FAIL, BUT IT BRINGS US ALMOST INTO AUGUST. CLAUSE-BY-CLAUSE DEBATE ON THE BILL, WITH EACH MEMBER GIVEN THE RIGHT TO SPEAK FOR 20 MINUTES ON EACH CLAUSE, MAKES PASSAGE UNLIKELY BEFORE MID-SEPTEMBER AT THE EARLIEST UNLESS PQ INVOKES CLOTURE. PQ MOST RELUCTANT TO TAKE THIS STEP PRIMARILY BECAUSE INVOKING CLOTURE ON A MEASURE OF SUCH FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE WOULD BE INVITING FURTHER CHARGES OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND UNDEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES. FURTHERMORE, IN ITS OPPOSITION DAYS PQ SCORED MANY POLITICAL POINTS BY FLAYING LIBERAL GOVERNMENT WHENEVER CLOTURE WAS IMPOSED. PQ WOULD NOT ENJOY HAVING THE TABLES TURNED.

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1. COMMENT: LEVESQUE'S RECENT LETTER TO PROVINCIAL PREMIERS PROPOSING BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS REGARDING ACCESS BY LINGUISTIC MINORITIES TO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN QUEBEC AND FRENCH SCHOOLS IN OTHER PROVINCES HAS GENERATED RESPONSES FROM HIS COUNTERPARTS SUFFICIENTLY POSITIVE FOR LEVESQUE TO AGREE TO ATTEND THE ST. ANDREWS, N.B. PM CONFERENCE NEXT MONTH. CONFERENCE HOST HATFIELD HAS AGREED TO ADD LANGUAGE-OF-EDUCATION ISSUE TO THE AGENDA, AND LEVESQUE SAID WEDNESDAY THAT HE WILL AMEND BILL 101'S "QUEBEC CLAUSE" IF HE GETS "THE LEAST ENCOURAGEMENT" AT THE CONFERENCE (QUEBEC 0287).

12. LEVESQUE WILL NEED TO BRING SOMETHING REASONABLY SUBSTANTIAL BACK FROM ST. ANDREWS TO WIN OVER HARDLINERS IN HIS CABINET TO A SOFTENING OF THE LANGUAGE BILL. THE BEST GUESS HERE IS THAT HE WILL GET IT. IF NOT, HE COULD WELL COME HOME AUGUST 20, BLAST ANGLOPHONE PROVINCES FOR HYPOCRICY IN REFUSING TO DO FOR FRANCOPHONES IN THEIR PROVINCES WHAT THEY WANT QUEBEC TO DO FOR ANGLOPHONES HERE, IMPOSE CLOTURE IMMEDIATELY, AND RAM BILL 101 THROUGH ON A WAVE OF NATIONALISTIC ENTHUSIASM.

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